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6 October 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr Park F. Wollan

SUBJECT: What Would Happen If Castro Died?

The attached paper, subject as above, is forwarded in response to your request of 5 October 1961.

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1 Attachment

DDP/WH/4/Intel/[REDACTED];naw (6 Oct 61)

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6 October 1961

SUBJECT: What would happen if Castro died?

1. Introduction.

The impact of Fidel Castro's sudden death would obviously have some internal repercussions on his Communist dominated regime. However, it would be wishful thinking to believe that the Cuban people would immediately rise up and overthrow the regime, now that Castro had departed the scene. In view of the tremendous strides made during the last five months toward the organization of Cuba into a complete police state and the lack of any unified anti-Castro opposition, there can be little doubt that the demise of Fidel Castro, whether by natural causes or assassination, would offer little opportunity for the liberation of Cuba from Communist and Soviet Bloc control. To believe otherwise would be to underestimate the strength and power of control of a Communist police state. If he died of assassination, instead of natural causes, the factor of his martyrdom to the Cuban masses would further strengthen the power of the present regime in maintaining control. Also, it is probable that the Soviet Bloc would react to such an event with greatly increased economic aid in order to assure maintenance of their established beachhead on the American continent. Although it is possible to anticipate the immediate results of the death by assassination of Fidel Castro, the end result of such an action would depend to a great extent on the respective effectiveness of the work of the police, the Communists, the military, and the anti-Castro groups.

2. Fidel Castro's Successor.

It would appear that Castro's successor would emerge from the following choices:

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CU-276 R/E

Raul Castro, Minister of Armed Forces  
"Che" Guevara, Minister of Industry  
Rumex Jimenez, Director INRA  
Faure Chomon, Ambassador to USSR

Early in 1961, Raul Castro was appointed Vice-President and principal executive officer of the Central Planning Committee. This increased authority and his continuing power as Minister of the Armed Forces rank him second only to the Prime Minister.

It is felt that Ernesto "Che" Guevara would not be acceptable to the Cuban people as he is not Cuban born. He appears destined to wield tremendous power but not as the ranking authority.

Rumex Jimenez, the Director of the Institute of Agrarian Reform lost a good portion of his industrial empire to "Che" Guevara during past reorganization and consequently relinquished considerable prestige among the present leadership.

Faure Chomon fought with Castro to oust Batista. He led his own "13th of March" group in the early fighting. Subsequently he was appointed as Cuban Ambassador to Moscow and it was generally conceded that, at the time, Castro was ridding himself of a potentially dangerous rival.

Of the four individuals aforementioned, none of them have the personal magnetism or popular support of Fidel Castro. On the other hand, Raul Castro, Guevara and all the top Communists together have strength and control which could not possibly be equalled by an opposition leader. Many of the most influential and promising young anti-Communists have long since left the country. Of the anti-Communists remaining in Cuba, many have been arrested and/or executed and any known or suspected ones would surely be rounded up quickly by the government forces in the advent of Fidel's death. Communications media, which are controlled almost completely by the government, would use every means to control and frighten the opposition from acting, and those who might otherwise support an opposition movement would be inclined to wait too long to act effectively.

- 2 -

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3. Reaction Among the Military and Security Forces.

The military leaders, under the direction of Raul Castro, would undoubtedly call for immediate increased use of police state methods, which would include mass arrests, tightening of all types of controls, increase of vigilance and informant reporting, and elimination, at least by arrest if not more violent action, of any anti-Castro figures of influence or strength.

4. General Reaction of the Cuban Populace.

Once dead, the first reaction should be a stunned shock and kind of suspended animation among the Cuban populace, while the security forces move in to tighten the lid still further. Raul Castro conceivably could take over and, supported by Che Guevara, initiate overwhelming propaganda about saving the revolution and trying to tidy Fidel up into an acceptable martyr. Fidel Castro is the one who has always had the magic hold on the people, been able to hypnotize them with his speeches and it is to Fidel that the urban and rural poor have always looked as a kind of "Great White Father", a symbol of invocation that is looked to, to right the wrongs done to them. The evils done are still not associated with him as much as with his subordinates and Fidel is the last court of appeal. The poorer classes feel that if his ear can only be gained, he will still make things right. Fidel's voice is what covers the naked power of the repressive organs and can still appeal. When he is out of the way, there will be no myth to cling to and no voice to lull.

5. Reaction Among Anti-Castro Individuals and Groups.

After the first shock, particularly of Castro's death, is accomplished sufficiently ignominiously (some still believe he is personally incorruptible) there should be an increase of restlessness and petty sabotage. If the same restrictions on travel outside the country continue that are now in force, the emotions leading people to flee into exile will be directed within and there can be an open war between the population and the repressive organs of the Security Services. The government would then most obviously be unpopular and at war with its own people. This would be the time for small well-trained, well-

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- 3 -  
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CU-322/5

supplied guerrilla groups to appear in the mountains. This would give heart to whatever may be left of the underground, give those who want to fight somewhere to go, provide a base for urban sabotage and greatly facilitate the overthrow of Fidel's unpopular heirs and their Bloc supporters.

If by some fluke such an assassination attempt should be successful, the only opposition group in any position at present to take advantage of wresting control from the Communists is the right-wing movement forming under FRIIO. This group's plans reportedly include use of a re-activated BATISTA army, now called the "Ex-Constitutional Army", which has an external militant organization composed of upwards of 5000 men for combat and a number of internal factions who have engaged in limited sabotage and resistance activity against the Castro regime. It also includes the CTC in Exile, headed by Eusebio MUJAL, and composed of a large number of experienced labor leaders. The resumption of power by this group would probably result in an early renewal of civil war and an eventual return to power of the Communists.

6. Reaction Among Neutral/Passive Cubans.

There are still a number of Cubans who support the cause of the socialist revolution, who revere Fidel Castro, and who still remain in Cuba, but who do not support the cause of Communism and who would be against any further takeover in Cuba by the Communist Party. In addition, there are those Cubans, primarily of the middle class, who have lost some of their precious wealth and position, and others who have become dissatisfied with increased state control and economic shortages. This group and those in definite opposition can be subdivided into those who have shown what might be termed a passive resistance to the Castro government, and those which have taken part to some extent in organized anti-Castro activities. Unfortunately the latter group probably lacks the leadership, organization, funds and material support to act effectively in opposition to the strict police state methods which would surely be imposed. Included in both the aforementioned groups and to a certain extent in the government forces, such as the Militia,

- 4 -

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CU-190

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are those persons who, although they do not basically support the Castro government, would wait to see the turn of events before they would commit themselves to changing sides.

7. Reaction Among Pre-Castro Cubans.

Certainly those Cubans who have gained through the changes brought about by the Castro revolution would continue to support his cause and to avenge his death. Those peasants who have gained materially, the youth who have acquired a new importance and recognition and who have been thoroughly indoctrinated by the socialist regime, would continue to support the government.

8. Communist Party Reaction.

Those leaders of the PSP (Partido Socialista Popular) the Cuban Communist Party, who are already in influential positions would certainly attempt not only to retain that influence but to increase it under advantageous circumstances. There are few government leaders left in Cuba who are anti-Communist to the extent that they would oppose the Communists.

9. Unilateral Actions By Latin American Nationals.

During the last few years, the Latin Americans have in addition to overthrowing three well established police states -- Peron, Perex Jimenez, Batista -- via internal uprisings -- conducted successful assassinations against four chiefs of state -- Ramon of Panama, Somoza of Nicaragua, Castillo Armas of Guatemala and Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. Therefore, the possibility of an assassination attempt against the Castro regime, which the Cubans may have concluded is the only alternative for achieving the overthrow, should not be ruled out.

10. Manner of Fidel Castro's Death.

The affects of Castro's death, particularly in the short run, depend considerably on how he dies. Because of the aura still clinging to the man in the minds of the radical left of Latin America, particularly among student groups, he is sure

- 3 SECRET

CU-191

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to remain the symbol of "Revolution". Thus, because of the need to undercut this image in the hemisphere as well as to destroy the final vestiges of regard in which he is held within Cuba, it is important that he not become a new martyr. The conditions surrounding his death must publically and irrefutably be set in one of two alternative situations; first, he can die ignominiously and in a situation that will contribute to besmirching his character or second; he can be eliminated by the Russians as being unstable and no longer necessary to their interests.

In the event of the death of Castro by natural means, rather than assassination, the immediate reaction by government forces might not be so severe, since they could not convincingly implicate the United States in such an event.

11. Probable Soviet Bloc Reactions.

The Cuban government would certainly hope for support from their Soviet Bloc friends in the event of any real crisis. To judge the extent to which this support would materialize is somewhat difficult. Certainly the Bloc would hope to protect their investment in Cuba, but on the other hand, the Soviets would probably hesitate to act in such a manner as to add to the already difficult world situation. Probably their interest in Cuba is not great enough to chance losing out in other strategic areas of the world. As a practical thing, it is believed that in a crisis the Soviet Bloc and the Chinese would intensify their economic support to Cuba in order to prevent that country from joining the ranks of free Latin American nations.

12. Conclusion.

It is fairly certain that the use of an assassination program as a means of overthrowing the Cuban Communist regime would have to be targeted against Fidel and Raul Castro, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and several other key Communists, to have any chance of creating enough chaos to provide an opportunity for the overthrow of the regime. In order to be effective such a program should be coordinated with a well organized resistance movement capable of providing a simultaneous

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internal uprising. Recently Saul CHIRAS, MEP leader in exile, commented that assassination presented the only real prospect for bringing about an early change in the Cuban situation. CHIRAS commented further that even an assassination program would not be a solution unless there was detailed and intelligent planning for action following the event.

Any hope for the eventual resumption of a democratic regime in Cuba lies, not in any anticipated or immediate takeover by opposition forces, but in the possible disagreement, disorganization, and fight for control that might result among the remaining leaders from the loss of Fidel Castro.

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- 7 -  
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